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**Digital platforms for South-South cooperation: WWP knowledge
translation of Brazilian social policies**

By

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Abstract

Over the last three decades, the good performance of emerging economies in terms of development indicators and social policies innovations gained international attention. International organisations such as the World Bank and the United Nations would recommend some social policy strategies and best practices implemented by developing countries to be exported over the Global South, creating a prosperous scenario for policy diffusion within the scope of South-South Cooperation (SSC) that lasted from 2010 to 2014, particularly with the emergence of digital platforms for SSC. These information and communication technology tools aim to strengthen policy diffusion among developing countries, providing knowledge and learning by means of digital materials, webinars, discussion forums and interactions on social networks. The literature review for the present study identified that some research has already focused on the knowledge diffusion carried out through these initiatives. Nevertheless, little has been addressed on knowledge translation. The main objective of this paper is to explore the possibilities of knowledge translation in digital platforms for SSC, starting from an analysis of the process adopted by the Brazil Learning Initiative for a World Without Poverty. WWP was a digital platform, active from 2013 to 2017, whose main goal was to disseminate Brazilian poverty reduction policies. It was funded by the World Bank and managed by the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG), the Institute for Applied Economic Research of Brazil and the Ministry of Social Development of Brazil. Interviews with five WWP staff members showed that the great effort made by a complex inter-organisational governance structure and its experts to translate robust knowledge of Brazilian social policies was not enough to succeed in its main goal of reaching the target audience and transferring policies from Brazil to Latin American and African countries. Despite all the effort made by WWP to translate knowledge of Brazilian social policies in a robust set of materials and publications, a lack of self-criticism and of documenting lessons learned threatened the translation of Brazilian social policies promoted by the initiative. These two factors were influenced by the fear of the political impact of admitting failures or exposing vulnerabilities in the implementation of Brazilian social policies.

Keywords: Knowledge translation. Digital platforms. South-South Cooperation.

Resumo

Nas três últimas décadas, o bom desempenho das economias emergentes nos indicadores de desenvolvimento e as inovações nas políticas sociais ganharam atenção internacional. Organizações internacionais como o Banco Mundial e as Nações Unidas recomendariam algumas estratégias e melhores práticas em políticas sociais implementadas pelos países em desenvolvimento para serem exportadas para o Sul Global, criando um cenário próspero para a difusão de políticas no âmbito da Cooperação Sul-Sul (CSS) e que durou entre 2010 e 2014, particularmente com o surgimento de plataformas digitais para CSS. Essas ferramentas de tecnologia da informação e comunicação visam fortalecer a difusão de políticas entre os países em desenvolvimento, fornecendo conhecimento e aprendizado por meio de materiais digitais, seminários virtuais (webinars), fóruns de discussão e interações nas redes sociais. A revisão de literatura deste estudo identificou que algumas pesquisas já se concentraram na difusão de conhecimento realizada no âmbito dessas iniciativas. No entanto, pouco foi abordado na tradução de conhecimento. O principal objetivo deste artigo é explorar as possibilidades de tradução de conhecimento em plataformas digitais para CSS, partindo de uma análise do processo de tradução de conhecimento adotado pela Iniciativa Brasileira de Aprendizagem por um Mundo Sem Pobreza. O WWP foi uma plataforma digital, ativa de 2013 a 2017, cujo principal objetivo era disseminar as políticas brasileiras de redução da pobreza. O projeto foi financiado pelo Banco Mundial e administrado pelo Centro Internacional de Políticas para o Crescimento Inclusivo (IPC-IG), o Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada e o Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social. Entrevistas realizadas com cinco colaboradores do WWP mostraram que o grande esforço realizado por uma complexa estrutura de governança interorganizacional e seus especialistas para traduzir um conhecimento robusto sobre as políticas sociais brasileiras não foi suficiente em alcançar o principal objetivo de atingir o público-alvo e transferir políticas do Brasil para países da América Latina e da África. Apesar de todo o esforço do WWP para traduzir o conhecimento das políticas sociais brasileiras em um conjunto robusto de materiais e publicações, a falta de autocrítica e de documentação das lições aprendidas ameaçaram a tradução das políticas sociais brasileiras promovidas pela iniciativa. Esses dois fatores foram influenciados pelo

medo do impacto político de admitir falhas ou expor vulnerabilidades na implementação das políticas sociais brasileiras.

Palavras-chave: Tradução de conhecimento. Plataformas digitais. Cooperação Sul-Sul.

Introduction

Since the late 1980s, facing a transition to democracy and the promulgation of its New Constitution (also nicknamed “Citizen Constitution”¹) Brazil has implemented innovative social policies, such as the *Bolsa Família* Programme, which improved inequalities, reducing poverty and hunger (PORTO DE OLIVEIRA, 2020). This prosperous scenario was also observed in several emerging economies from Latin America, Africa and Asia, leading to high expectations on a new global order that could shift the traditional and vertical power relation from North-South Cooperation² of policy transfer to a new and horizontal South-South Cooperation (SSC) (PORTO DE OLIVEIRA; PAL, 2018). In addition, this change in perspective put into practice the concept of Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries. The TCDC is a type of cooperation announced by the United Nations in the early 1970s, which was later described as an adaptation to the neoliberal economic order (KERN; WEISTAUBB, 2011 *apud* SOUZA, 2014). It is also an effective tool to promote development, mobilizing and distributing resources and expertise, based on horizontality and knowledge exchange among developing countries (SOUZA, 2014).

The domain of technical knowledge in social policies has become a recognized expertise and has increased the power of the Southern states in relation to international institutions. International organisations such as the World Bank and the

¹ The current Brazilian Federal Constitution was promulgated in 1988, after the military rule ended. It earned the nickname “Citizen Constitution” for having been formulated with civic engagement and for its innovations in the social field, such as the guarantee of social rights for citizens, for instance, the social security and a benefit for the elderly and disabled in situations of social vulnerability. Moreover, it raised social assistance to the level of public policy.

² Policies designed in the countries of the North have always been models for the Global South. According to Porto de Oliveira and Pal (2018), there are four factors taken into account in this hegemonic movement: the dependence of developing countries on the countries of the North; past colonial relations; donor action in development cooperation experiences; and obtaining international recognition through the image of a politically reliable, organized and stable state.

United Nations have started to recommend some social policy strategies and best practices implemented by developing countries to be exported over the Global South, creating an optimistic perspective for policy promotion within the scope of SSC initiatives.

Brazil, which was already being recognized as an emerging global player and a regional power, also benefited from the direct interest and participation of international organisations, becoming a global policy exporter (PORTO DE OLIVEIRA, 2020). The country developed a broader international strategy to export its social policies, including the creation of institutions designed for policy transfers and proactive engagement in development cooperation – whose “DNA” was the transfer of “ideas, social technologies, expertise, policy models, and instruments to other countries, in particular those in the South” (PORTO DE OLIVEIRA, 2020, p. 6).

The innovations made by developing countries in the social field have built international and regional policy networks on social protection dedicated to facilitating voluntary exchange and mutual learning among policy makers (BENDER; KELLER; WILLING, 2014). These policy networks have found even more potential for growth and dissemination with the help of information and communication technology tools (ICTs) (JANUS; KLINGEBIEL; PAULO, 2015), such as digital platforms aimed to strengthen the diffusion of social policies between developing countries, by providing knowledge, evidences and best practices through digital materials, webinars, discussion forums, online training courses, interactions on social networks, and so on. Some examples of digital platforms for SSC are the “SocialProtection.org”³, the “South-South Galaxy”⁴, the “South-South Global Thinkers”⁵, the “Evidence and Lessons from Latin America”⁶, the “Eco-System Based Adaptation Through South-South Cooperation”⁷.

³ <<https://socialprotection.org/>>.

⁴ <<https://www.unsouthsouth.org/south-south-galaxy/>>.

⁵ <<https://www.ssc-globalthinkers.org/>>.

⁶ <<http://ella.practicalaction.org/>>.

⁷ <<http://www.ebasouth.org/>>.

These online platforms benefit from technology to disseminate low-cost, accessible, inclusive and autonomous knowledge expertise to SSC. These initiatives are transnational and digital and are presented in bilateral and triangular cooperation formats, involving communities of practices made of state and non-state actors, such as international organizations, research centers and think tanks (SOCIALPROTECTION.ORG, 2020). Therefore, due to a new and complex scenario and a lot of potential involved in these digital platforms, there are challenges to be observed and delivered, as pointed out by Ian Thorpe, Chief of the Learning and Knowledge Exchange Section at UNICEF, during the webinar “Digital platforms as tools for enhancing South-South and triangular cooperation towards the SDGs” (SOCIALPROTECTION.ORG, 2020).

One of the challenges mentioned above is: how can these digital platforms for SSC better capture and document public policy experiences, so that other countries adapt them to their realities and meet a real need? In other words, what are the possibilities of knowledge translation in digital platforms for SSC? Literature review identified that there are an increasingly number of research focused on knowledge diffusion within the scope of SSC and/or TCDC (PORTO DE OLIVEIRA, 2020, 2017; CONSTANTINE; SHANKLAND, 2017; BENDER; KELLER; WILLING, 2014). Nevertheless, little has been addressed on knowledge translation (KUHLMANN, 2019; STONE, 2012), and also has been neglected by literature. Knowledge translation is an intermediary process to avoid incomplete and inadequate transfers and diffusions. Without some kind of translation, policies simply would not fit into different contexts, nor would be accepted by heterogeneous groups (PORTO DE OLIVEIRA, 2018).

There is, therefore, a research gap in this field that needs to be identified and explored so that it can target empirical issues on knowledge translation. The starting point of this research will be an analysis of the knowledge translation process adopted by the Brazil Learning Initiative for a World Without Poverty. WWP was a digital platform, active from 2013 to 2017, whose main goal was to disseminate Brazilian poverty reduction policies. It was funded by the World Bank and managed by the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG), the Institute for

Applied Economic Research of Brazil and the Ministry of Social Development of Brazil.

The main question to be addressed is “how did the WWP translate the knowledge of Brazilian social policies?”. This research focuses on the hypothesis that the great effort made by a complex inter-organisational governance structure and its experts to translate robust knowledge of Brazilian social policies was not enough to succeed in its main goal of reaching the target audience and transferring policies from Brazil to Latin American and African countries. Based on literature review and interviews with five WWP staff members, it found that despite all the effort made by WWP to translate knowledge of Brazilian social policies in a robust set of materials and publications, a lack of self-criticism and of documenting lessons learned threatened the translation of Brazilian social policies promoted by the initiative. These two factors were influenced by the fear of the political impact of admitting failures or exposing vulnerabilities in the implementation of Brazilian social policies.

Besides the main objective, this research also aims to briefly tackle the knowledge generation, diffusion and translation in the context of SSC initiatives, and the differences between each concept; their interface with both the growing field of digital platforms; moreover, introduce the WWP initiative and its knowledge translation and diffusion; finally, present key results and conclusions.

With this work, I hope to contribute to a reflection about the challenge of translating public policies for actors as heterogeneous as those involved in SSC and in an environment as plural, democratic, and innovative as the Internet. As a Bachelor in Communication and Specialist in Public Policy and Social Development, the discovery of a multidisciplinary research field motivates my academic and professional goals. It is essential to communicate the origin of my interest in studying the WWP initiative, for which I worked, from 2014 to 2016, as a Communication Assistant. It is also essential to declare that there is no conflict of interest involved in relation to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article, since the project ended its activities in 2017.

Knowledge generation for South-South Cooperation

South-South Cooperation (SSC) emerged shortly after World War II, in a context in which “Third World”⁸ countries were dealing with their decolonization processes and being aware that their inequality and poverty issues are historical and structural characteristics of the Global South. They were also seeking innovative strategies towards autonomy, self-sufficiency and less dependency on international aid. SSC has been responsible for changing the perspectives of developing countries, showing cooperation between the South as an alternative to assistance from the North. This counter-hegemonic model is partnership-based, rather than donor-recipient-based, which means that it lies on mutual exchanges and benefits, as well as horizontal and interactive transfers (SOUZA, 2014). According to the United Nations Development Program, SSC “is a broad framework for collaboration among countries of the South in the political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, and technical domains [...] [in which] developing countries share knowledge, skills, expertise and resources to meet their development goals through concerted efforts” (UNDP, 2007 *apud* CONSTANTINE, 2017, p. 105).

One of the reasons for boosting SSC among developing nations was their confidence about the value of the knowledge derived from “direct experience of policy making and implementation in the provider’s own country [, which built a sense that they] [...] have much to learn as well as much to teach” (CONSTANTINE, 2017, p. 105). Jones et al (2013) ponders that not only research-based knowledge counts as legitimate knowledge to policy making, but also practice-informed knowledge. Scientists and scholars are able to provide research and evidence-based knowledge; however, they may not succeed in communicating with stakeholders due to technical terms, which ends up excluding policy makers from debates. On the other hand, practice-informed knowledge deals with tacit knowledge derived from experiences of implementing policies and practices (JONES, 2013, p. 7).

⁸ “Third World” was a qualification referring to African, Asian and Latin American developing nations that were gaining independence in a post-colonial international order. This label was replaced by “Global South”, which implies the existence of actors occupying a peripheral or semi-peripheral position in the international system and who articulate themselves to build a process of counter-hegemonic globalization (GROVOGUI, 2010; CAIRO, BRINGEL, 2010 *apud* SOUZA, 2014).

This emphasis on knowledge exchange led to a growth in interest in “mutual learning” as well as “mutual benefit”. Drawing on this long tradition of supporting opportunities for learning in the “global South”, either between regions or among countries within the same region, SSC has formed the foundation for a wide range of multistakeholder knowledge-sharing exchanges in the South. (CONSTANTINE, 2017, p. 106).

Their willingness to learn from successful practices in the Region created an effervescent voluntary provision of policymaking experiences and implementations made available by Southern countries – “rather than from the deployment of transnational expertise in the observation and synthesis of other countries’ experiences” (CONSTANTINE, 2017, p. 105). This has led to a cycle of knowledge generation, transmission and use (JONES at al., 2012 *apud* JANUS, 2015) for many purposes. For instance: research production; dissemination, diffusion, and implementation of policy; and evaluation of existing policy (GRAHAM, 2008).

Research production has synthesised these “movements of a political object in time and space” in basically three traditions that are far from being technical, linear and rational: policy transfer, policy diffusion, and policy circulation (PORTO DE OLIVEIRA; PAL, 2018, p. 208; PORTO DE OLIVEIRA, 2020, p. 22-30). Policy transfer refers to “a specific displacement of a policy from one jurisdiction to another” or between “a few political units” in “unidirectional movements” (PORTO DE OLIVEIRA, 2017, p. 16-19; 2020, p. 22-30). Dolowitz and Marsh (2000 *apud* KUHLMANN et al., 2019, p. 4) define policy transfer as a “process by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting [...] is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system”. Policy diffusion is “a collective adoption of a public policy” “that encompass several states, eventually from distinct continents”, “that can be identified by their geographic proximity, such as Latin American states, or by a shared historical background, that can be political, institutional and/or ideological [...]” (PORTO DE OLIVEIRA, 2017, p. 16-19; 2020, p. 22-30). Maggetti and Gilardi (2016 *apud* KUHLMANN et al., 2019, p. 3) have stated that policy diffusion is a process “in which policies in one unit are influenced by concepts, proposals, policies or ideas from another unit”. Policy circulation is “a

longer and broader flow, in time and space, that can also imply back and forward policy movements” to “frame rather diffuse and multidirectional processes” (PORTO DE OLIVEIRA, 2017, p. 16-19; 2020, p. 22-30).

In order to travel over the three above-mentioned traditions (transfer, diffusion and circulation), policy knowledge implies some kind of translation, which requires interpretation by those who are taking, receiving or implementing policies. During translation, it is expected that models are changed and adapted both on their material components (e.g. model, administrative arrangement, programme, standard, etc.) and on the abstract dimension (e.g. idea, ideological or political content, belief about the cause of a public problem, principles, etc.). Without translation, policies simply would not fit into diversified contexts, nor would be accepted by different groups (PORTO DE OLIVEIRA; PAL, 2018).

As Bhabha (2007) explains in his postcolonial theory of “cultural translation”:

In the act of translation the “given” content becomes alien and estranged; and that, in its turn, leaves the language of translation *Aufgabe*, always confronted by its double, the untranslatable – alien and foreign. (BHABHA, 2007, p. 231).

In other words, cultural translation cannot untie power relations and asymmetries between languages, regions and people in order to describe, interpret and disseminate ideas and views (COSTA, 2010). This means that a translation process reshapes each political object in relation to the other – the one that is considered the traditional – and displaces this new political object “in the same critical act”. “This emphasis on political representation, the construction of discourse, is a radical contribution to the translation of the theory” (BHABHA, 2007, p. 53). Therefore, this space of translation is a spot of hybridity:

[...] where the construction of a political object that is new, neither the one nor the other, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics. (BHABHA, 2007, p. 51).

Kuhlmann et al. (2019) faces translation as a stage of the flow of policies, called perception and translation, which precedes the stage of cooperation and conflict, and

the stage of collective decision-making. Perception and translation is at play when actors that are going to receive the policy “acquire new knowledge of policies in other contexts and transform these into their own policy legacies” (KUHLMANN et al., 2019, p. 6-7). During the stage of perception and translation, the active role of receiver units “becomes tangible in emphasizing processes of perception, increased attention, deeper understanding, intellectual reception and reinterpretation” (KUHLMANN et al., 2019, p. 6-7). Nevertheless, it can also occur in the event of a more passive role of the receiver unit facing a more active, persuasive or powerful role of the giver unit. According to Dobbin et al. (2007 *apud* KUHLMANN et al., 2019, p. 8), a giver unit can play a protagonist role on the stage of perception and translation because of “having implemented a successful policy due to hegemonic factors”.

In Porto de Oliveira and Pal (2018, p. 211), translation can also be taken as a strategy to persuade specific groups. Agents who advocate a certain type of policy can produce different narratives to fit convenient principles or simplify a policy to boost its circulation. As Stone (2000) says, knowledge is not apolitical and “knowledge intermediaries” can be engaged not only in promoting policy learning⁹, but also in indirect coercion¹⁰.

These agents are coined by literature as “public policy ambassadors”, “knowledge intermediaries”, “policy entrepreneurs”, “policy brokers”, “epistemic communities”, “advocacy coalitions” and “interpretative communities” in order to emphasize their role of advocating policy solutions through sharing of experiences, networks and resources (PORTO DE OLIVEIRA; PAL, 2018) (KINGDON, 2011; INGOLD; VARONE, 2012; HAAS, 1992 *apud* JONES et al., 2013) (SABATIER, 1991 *apud* STONE, 2000) (ACHARYA, 2004 *apud* STONE, 2012). Stone (2012, p. 11)

⁹ Learning is a theory where countries are believed to draw lessons from the rational observation of their own experiences and from the policy experiments of their peers. Learning occurs as a result of a changing in their beliefs about cause and effect of a policy implementation, leading to policy innovation and transfer (DOBBIN; SIMMONS; GARRETT, 2007; STONE, 2000).

¹⁰ Indirect coercion or soft coercion is a theory that relates to powerful nation-states, international organisations, and nongovernmental actors indirectly influencing “weak actors” through hegemonic ideas and policy leadership that lead to a change in the *status quo* and, consequently, a policy adoption (DOBBIN; SIMMONS; GARRETT, 2007; PORTO DE OLIVIERA; FARIA, 2017).

highlights that these “intermediary policy spaces” are responsible for mutating and transforming policy ideas through the process of translation”.

Such partnerships or networks [...] [are] engaged in a continuous process of translation and modification (FREEMAN, 2009) [...]. [...] their collective interactions constitute structures of policy translation (LENDVAI AND STUBBS, 2007). [...] In conjunction with other dynamics, policy transfer/translation has the unintended consequence of fuelling transnational governance and giving shape and substance to new policy spaces. (STONE, 2012, p. 13-14).

Stone (2000) calls these structures of policy translation as “knowledge actors”, who work within networks. They act as “policy networks” – arrangements to promote exchange of information, debate, persuasion, and search for solutions and policy responses – and aim to disseminate information on innovative policies being adopted elsewhere. They represent “a soft, informal and gradual mode for the international diffusion and dissemination of ideas and policy paradigms”. They can be seen as a channel through which organisations “can project their ideas into policy thinking across states and within global or regional fora”, producing discourses, building consensual knowledge, and creating new policy arrangements for global public policy networks (STONE, 2000, p. 15-20).

Networks are an organisational form with extraordinary capacities for innovation, managing risk, building trust, facilitating joint action and gathering information in a manner that flows around and between geographical, legal and institutional barriers. When networks include the active participation and involvement of decision-makers they have the potential to influence policy. [...] Moreover, the interaction of official decision-makers (politicians and bureaucrats) with relevant stakeholders and experts, helps to reinforce the credibility and legitimacy of network participants in the formulation and implementation of policy. (STONE, 2000, p. 15).

Policy networks engage its stakeholders through communication structures based on newsletters, databases, conferences and e-dialogues (STONE, 2000). This communication apparatus is facilitated by the global spread of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (JANUS; KLINGEBIEL; PAULO, 2015) and has been releasing information through websites, portals and gateways (NARAYANASWAMY, 2013).

As mentioned by Ian Thorpe, Chief of the Learning and Knowledge Exchange Section at UNICEF, during the webinar “Digital platforms as tools for enhancing South-South and triangular cooperation towards the SDGs” (SOCIALPROTECTION.ORG, 2020), there is a lot of potential for using technology to lower cost and make knowledge exchange simpler for South-South Cooperation (SSC). Some of the potentials and benefits of these online platforms for SSC, identified by Thorpe, are: creating a market-place to connect supply and demand for knowledge expertise; being a knowledge base of good practices and evidences; building a community of practice made of policy makers, practitioners, experts, researches, etc.; undertaking online training courses; being an online code repository for software developers that work for public policy solutions. Nevertheless, they also face challenges, and one of the most elementary one is explained by Ian Thorpe: “We have a successful programme, but ‘how do we capture and document that experience, so that other people can see if it is relevant to them, and then adapt that [experience] and use that [knowledge]?’” (SOCIALPROTECTION.ORG, 2020). In other words, how can these digital platforms for SSC better capture and document public policy experiences, so that other countries adapt them to their realities and meet a real need? Or, what are the possibilities of knowledge translation in digital platforms for SSC?

Digital platforms for South-South Cooperation: the Brazil Learning Initiative for a World Without Poverty (WWP)

Policy networks have found even more potential for growth and dissemination with the help of information and communication technology tools (ICTs) (JANUS; KLINGEBIEL; PAULO, 2015), such as digital platforms aimed to strengthen the diffusion of social policies between developing countries, by providing knowledge, evidences and best practices through digital materials, webinars, discussion forums, online training courses, interactions on social networks, and so on. These online platforms benefit from technology to disseminate low-cost, accessible, inclusive and autonomous knowledge expertise to SSC. These initiatives are transnational and digital and are presented in bilateral and triangular cooperation formats, involving communities of practices made of state and non-state actors, such as international

organizations, research centers and think tanks (SOCIALPROTECTION.ORG, 2020). Some examples of digital platforms for SSC are the “SocialProtection.org”¹¹, the “South-South Galaxy”¹², the “South-South Global Thinkers”¹³, the “Evidence and Lessons from Latin America”¹⁴, the “Eco-System Based Adaptation Through South-South Cooperation”¹⁵, and the “WWP”¹⁶ – which is this research’s main object.

The Brazil Learning Initiative for a World Without Poverty (WWP) was a digital platform, active from 2013 to 2017, whose main goal was to disseminate Brazilian poverty reduction policies and to connect its practitioners in order to develop their own capacities to deliver social programmes in developing countries. Throughout the first half of the second decade of the 21st century, Brazil received an increasing number of requests from Southern countries for international technical cooperation initiatives, as well as the organisation of study tours and technical missions (WWP, 2017). For instance, from 2011 to 2016, Brazil received 455 delegations from 107 countries for technical missions with the purpose of learning on some social policy issues, such as conditional cash transfers, food and nutrition security, social assistance, productive inclusion, and monitoring and evaluation. The majority of missions were from countries in Latin America and Africa (GARCIA, 2018). In view of the growing demand for knowledge sharing about Brazilian social policies, the Brazilian government and the World Bank created the WWP to fill the hitherto existing documentation and dissemination gap about these programmes.

According to WWP Activity Report 2013-2017 (WWP, 2017), the initiative was established in March 2013 by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by four partners: the World Bank, the Ministry of Social Development of Brazil¹⁷ (MDS) – currently the Ministry of Citizenship of Brazil –, the Institute for Applied

¹¹ <<https://socialprotection.org/>>.

¹² <<https://www.unsouthsouth.org/south-south-galaxy/>>.

¹³ <<https://www.ssc-globalthinkers.org/>>.

¹⁴ <<http://ella.practicalaction.org/>>.

¹⁵ <<http://www.ebasouth.org/>>.

¹⁶ < <http://wwp.org.br/en/>>.

¹⁷ Established in 2004, MDS is the ministry in charge of designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating Brazilian social policies in the federal sphere (GARCIA, 2018).

Economic Research (IPEA)¹⁸, and the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG)¹⁹. WWP was funded²⁰ by the World Bank, becoming one of the bank's actions for promoting social development, addressing the goal of eradicating extreme poverty in the world, and approaching the “science of delivery” – which is a concept developed by the bank that consists of generating knowledge about the implementation and results of policies, and spreading experiences both nationally and internationally (WWP, 2017). The roles of the IPC-IG and IPEA were to provide expertise on Brazilian and global social policy issues, giving technical inputs to decision making. The IPC-IG was also responsible for giving administrative support to hire the WWP team and to manage the WWP funds. The MDS was the main source of knowledge about the Brazilian social policies – many of the WWP publications were written and produced by Brazilian government officials.

The WWP's knowledge generation was settled by a complex inter-organisational governance structure in a matrix arrangement (GARCIA, 2016), “based on a mutually agreed work plan adopted by the partners [...] [and composed by] different committees, which plan, debate and approve all activities” (WWP, 2017, p. 19). WWP's governance was composed by: a Board of Directors, in charge of coordinating strategic and policy-related activities; a Secretariat, for the formulation of technical directives and the work plan; an Editorial Committee, for the definition of the editorial policy; a Technical Committee, for the elaboration of technical content; and, finally, a Communication Committee, for the communication and dissemination strategy. Each of these committees was expected to have two representatives from each partner of the initiative. This contributed to building a general sense of ownership among the institutions, especially due to the content's revision and validation processes (WWP, 2017).

¹⁸ Established in 1964, IPEA is a Brazilian government-led research organization to provide technical support in order to base government planning and policy making (GARCIA, 2018).

¹⁹ Founded in 2002, IPC-IG is a global forum for South-South dialogue on innovative development policies aimed to promote the production and dissemination of studies and policy recommendations, the exchange of best practices in development initiatives, and the expansion of South-South dialogue. It results of a partnership agreement between the Government of Brazil and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

²⁰ The World Bank, through the Institutional Development Fund (IDF), awarded a Trust Fund (No. TF016605) totaling USD600,000 to the WWP initiative. The total amount was to be spent from March 2015 to December 2017. It was given to MDS and administered by IPC-IG/UNDP (WWP, 2017).

The WWP website was a repository of knowledge made available in different formats – digital publications, videos, webinars, newsletters, etc. – and in four languages – Portuguese, English, Spanish and French. Even after the end of the initiative, in 2017, its website (wwp.org.br) remains online, being managed by the current Ministry of Citizenship of Brazil (former MDS). There are 80 technical articles, each available in four languages, the content of which covers almost 30 different Brazilian social policies. In addition to the technical publications, which were the majority of knowledge products available on the WWP website, the digital platform also published 39 videos (series of short videos, series of case studies, event videos and training videos), held webinars and disseminated face-to-face events and information through monthly newsletters and the partners’ social media channels. In 2017 (the last year of the initiative’s operations), WWP publications registered more than 250,000 downloads – with the *Bolsa Família* Programme and the Unified Registry being the most searched topics –, in addition to 290,000 page views and 1,174 newsletter subscribers. According to its final report, these results were achieved thanks to the WWP’s ability to link “the worldwide demand for implementation and ‘on-the-ground’ policy-related information” to “an array of different media”, promoting “peer-to-peer learning experiences” (WWP, 2017, p. 63).

The WWP knowledge generation started with the conduction of surveys to define themes of interest within the target audience. Three surveys were carried out, covering 132 participants from 61 countries at three international events held in Brazil in 2013 and 2014. Based on their responses, in 2014 WWP began its knowledge production by covering issues²¹ related to the Unified Registry, the conditionalities of the *Bolsa Família* Programme and the federal coordination of Brazilian social programmes. Thereafter, the qualified technical bodies of the World Bank and the MDS began to research, adapt, create and coordinate the production of these technical contents “that primarily served the needs and interests of the international public and, eventually, of national and subnational managers, academic institutions, specialized journalists and society in general” (GARCIA, 2018, p. 41).

²¹ By 2015, other topics, such as monitoring and evaluation, federative coordination, productive inclusion and social assistance were included in the knowledge production.

Experts of the thematic secretariats of the MDS wrote the majority of the content. These secretariats are the ministry branches in the coordination of the national social programmes and were very active in the WWP's knowledge production, validation and approval (GARCIA; CORTIZO, 2016). As knowledge production grew and became more demanding, it became necessary to hire full-time consultants. This reinforcement in the knowledge production team allowed WWP partners to better manage their tasks, avoiding overloads and reducing the risk of misunderstandings and interpersonal and inter-organisational conflicts. Within the scope of the work that was expected to be elaborated by the consultant there was more analytical and evaluative contents, such as logical models for social programmes, management instruments, mapping of flows and processes, result evaluations, and lessons learned (GARCIA, 2018).

After the knowledge production stage, carried out mainly by MDS technical team, but also in collaboration with experts from the World Bank and full-time consultants, the final content was sent first to the Technical Committee and then to the Editorial Committee for validation and approval. Whenever the committees did not reach a consensus on the content of a given product, its publication on the website was not allowed. No material would be available in WWP website without the review and approval of all members of at least two committees (usually Technical and Editorial; the Communication team would join the review and approval stage mostly in case of videos) (GARCIA, 2018). With the content approved by the Editorial Committee, the products were sent to proofreading, and then translation and graphical design. After all these stages, the publication could finally be made available on the WWP website (GARCIA; DE PAULA; CORTIZO, 2014).

An evaluation carried out by WWP with 150 social policy managers and technicians who attended the 11th International Seminar on Social Policies for Development, in May 2016, revealed that 53.2% of them considered WWP publications suitable for their purposes. Another evaluation carried out in December 2016 with 10 representatives of international organisations and African governments showed that, for 90%, WWP materials were very good or excellent, mainly in relation to their relevance to the work, level of knowledge and clarity of information. Finally, a third evaluation, submitted between January and February 2017 to the 105 most frequent

readers of the newsletter, pointed out that WWP's knowledge products were positively evaluated according to some aspects, for instance, relevance to improving the respondent's knowledge; relevance to the implementation of a similar programme in another country; knowledge level; clarity of information; level of detail; and addressing important issues. It also showed that 56.3% agreed that WWP knowledge products were relevant to the design, implementation and/or management of a similar policy, programme or tool in another country (WWP, 2017, p. 59-61).

Indeed, it was expected that WWP would be successful in documenting and disseminating knowledge about Brazil. Nevertheless, one common challenge for digital platforms like WWP is how they can better capture and document public policy experiences, so that other countries adapt them to their realities and meet a real need. Bringing this concern to the WWP, this study seeks to reflect on the knowledge translation process adopted by the Brazil Learning Initiative for a World Without Poverty about Brazilian social policies. This research focuses on the hypothesis that the great effort made by a complex inter-organisational governance structure to translate robust knowledge of Brazilian social policies was not enough to succeed in its main goal of reaching the target audience and transferring policies from Brazil to countries from Latin America and Africa.

The WWP knowledge translation of Brazilian social policies

WWP knowledge products were based on the "know-how" and expertise of its partners in delivering systems and implementing programmes, with a focus on the "how to" of the Brazilian experience in social protection. Its technical contents were organised by three levels of knowledge, as follows (WWP, 2017, p. 15-24):

1. **Summary sheets:** it presented the broader features of a social policy or programme in a two-page publication divided into topics, for an immediate comprehension and a point of entry to each subject or policy addressed;
2. **Articles:** it detailed programme sheets and policy reports in a length from three to ten pages, providing in-depth information about policies and specific topics of programmes;

3. **Case studies:** it emphasised, over 20 to 30 pages, the details of social policies and implementation challenges through a “science of delivery” methodology, which focuses on more practical results and more profound knowledge in order to facilitate the exchange of experiences.

They were also divided into seven thematic axes, as follows (WWP, 2017, p. 25-28):

1. **Unified Registry (*Cadastro Único*):** a tool for the identification and socio-economic characterisation of low-income families, with 27 million registered families, used for different social programmes and policies;
2. ***Bolsa Família* Programme:** one of the world’s largest conditional cash transfer programmes, which reaches more than 13 million families and has conditionalities on health and education;
3. **Productive inclusion:** local initiatives that helped families to seek financial autonomy and to overcome vulnerabilities and improve their quality of life;
4. **Food security:** information regarding the Food Purchase Programme (PAA), which developed a market-place linking the government of Brazil and family farmers, and inspired the Food Purchase Programme for Africa (PAA Africa); and the Cistern Programme for building concrete plate cisterns for storing water for household consumption and productive activities in the Semi-Arid Region;
5. **Social assistance:** information about the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS), which is a government-run system that has been organising and funding social assistance services since 2005; as well as the Child Labour Eradication Programme (PETI) and the Continuous Welfare Benefit for the Elderly and Disabled (BPC);
6. **Monitoring and evaluation:** management of public policies in Brazil has become more complex and professional, seeking monitoring and evaluation of its programmes and services in order to support evidence-based knowledge production;
7. **Policy coordination:** integrated coordination at inter-sectoral and inter-federal level of the social policies within the Brazil Without Extreme Poverty Plan.

To assist in this knowledge generation, the WWP technical team developed a script composed of a set of topics that should be answered for any written content on social policies. These topics aimed to facilitate the comprehension of the so-called “how to” approach, which explains how the programme works or how to do something similar. They had to cover these: executive summary (what the programme is); goals; history and timeline; stakeholders and practitioners; management and execution; how it works; management instruments (processes, flows, IT system, other technologies and tools used); logical model of the programme; monitoring and evaluation of the programme; audits; social control; target audience and selection criteria; coverage; financing resources; legislation; results and impacts; lessons learned, challenges and potential; and additional information. Furthermore, WWP publications sought to be objective, didactic, illustrative (with the use of graphs, tables and flowcharts), relevant and updated, as well as avoiding any technicalities that could confuse or hinder the understanding of Brazilian policies by foreigners. Some tools made it easier to understand the content, such as boxes and footnotes with additional information, curiosities and backstage information, numbers and significant results (GARCIA, 2018).

In order to provide more information to the qualitative analysis of this study, five semi-structured interviews were applied to professionals²² directly involved in the knowledge production and, as consequence, the knowledge translation at WWP – members of the Technical, Editorial and Communication Committees. The answers obtained were synthesized and analyzed along the following passages of this work. All participants evaluate WWP knowledge production as high quality, positive and efficient. The prominence of high-skilled experts on Brazilian social policies and the mutual-learning environment encouraged by an inter-organisational governance structure were pointed as fundamental to guarantee the quality of the publications. “This was an avant-garde feature of the initiative because it united both government

²² They are: Daniel Plech Garcia, public servant of the Ministry of Citizenship (at the time, MDS) and responsible for articulating the knowledge production of WWP under the MDS; Roberta Pelella Mélega Cortizo, public servant of the Ministry of Citizenship and technician responsible for the content elaboration of various WWP materials under the MDS; Claudia Regina Baddini Curralero, public servant serving on the Administrative Council for Economic Defense and manager of the WWP at the World Bank; Julia Segatto Barros, journalist and WWP communications consultant at the World Bank; and Marco Amorim Prates, journalist and WWP communication assistant at the IPC-IG.

entities, research entities and international organisations [...] [to produce a content] that was thought by the four institutions”, said one respondent. According to Stone (2012, p. 14), “assemblage” (“the mix of ideas and interplay of interests”) in the knowledge translation undertaken by international organisations helps the construction of new architectures for these venues. As an unintended consequence, it fuels transnational governance and gives shape and substance to new policy spaces. Stone believes, therefore, that knowledge translation is a substratum of the governmentality involved in policy transfer. Not coincidentally, the first benefited from WWP knowledge translation was the Brazilian government itself, followed by the other WWP partner institutions. The material produced in the scope of the WWP served as a guide for public policy managers at the federal, state and municipal levels and even for the dissemination of the work developed by Brazil internally, which was considered by all respondents as a positive aspect of the WWP legacy.

All respondents agree that WWP knowledge translation was guided in order to facilitate the replication of content, ideas and processes in different contexts. According to them, the contents should stimulate understanding of other countries about the dimension of institutional, legal, legislative and political arrangements taken by Brazil in the consolidation of its public policies – which, according to one interviewee, was not an “overnight” process. In order to meet a certain quality standard, WWP products should present the social programme’s context, history, timeline, motivations, pillars, purposes, legal framework, how it works, and any aspect that could help the implementation of a similar initiative in another country. “In knowledge production, it was very important for us to be able to address what matters and how we need to explain, so that they can understand what we did and see if it is appropriate to adapt to their reality”, answered a participant.

We started from the idea that, with social protection policies, you can eliminate poverty. That was the idea: “if you build as similar foundations of social protection as Brazil, you can also reduce poverty”. We had a truth to tell and we documented it. It was possible to build knowledge on top of something very solid. And our product was coherent, consistent, because it really had something to show. (excerpt from interview with a WWP staff).

Nevertheless, knowledge translation has partially fulfilled its purpose. Firstly, all participants agree that there was a lack of self-criticism about Brazilian social policies at the WWP knowledge generation process. They report that both the Secretariat and the Editorial Committee would encourage this because they were afraid of the political impact of admitting failures or exposing vulnerabilities in the implementation of Brazilian social policies. Respondents disagreed when naming the partner who would be most concerned with political repercussions: one participant cited the MDS, due to the negative impact it could have on the reputation of Brazilian policies; and another cited the World Bank, for fear of negative impact on the WWP. Some respondents reported cases of cutting information in some texts and in excerpts from videos because they understood that, politically, it could be negative for the government. “The technical team sometimes disagreed [on the information cuts], but the Editorial Committee was concerned with possible political repercussions. So, sometimes, there was a little friction in that sense”, answered a WWP staff member. According to Jones et al. (2013), political contexts, including constraints on power and ability to absorb change, can shape and influence knowledge-policy interactions. As Porto de Oliveira and Pal (2018) pointed, it is not only important to understand the meanings underlying policies and their translation when they are transferred from one place to another, but also to monitor what is lost in the translation process. Participants agree that not all details of the implementation of a public policy need to be documented, especially those that concern the particularities of the country that implements the policy.

For example, it is necessary to explain that Brazil is a federative unit, so that the audience understands the role of states and municipalities; but there is no need to explain the thousand details of the operation, as each country will adapt to its reality. (excerpt from interview with a WWP staff).

Secondly, some respondents believe that there should have been a greater effort to record lessons learned and mishaps in the implementation of social programmes, which would contribute even more efficiently to the transfer of policies to the countries of the South.

I think the lesson learned is very important to put. We need to show what worked, but also the difficulties, so that other countries can avoid making

the same mistakes. This shows maturity in recognizing that we are learning from experiences. (excerpt from interview with a WWP staff).

Thirdly, all respondents questioned the real impact that WWP knowledge translation had in stimulating the implementation of social policies inspired by the Brazilian experience in countries of the Global South. They complain about the lack of establishing dissemination goals, as well as a monitoring and evaluation strategy, for the WWP knowledge products – initiatives that could have made possible to map the success or not of knowledge transfer. “I think we ended up managing to produce more than disseminate. It is no use just producing; it is necessary to make the materials reach those who are interested, who can cause some transformation”, said a respondent. However, they differ on the understanding that the WWP would be responsible for ensuring the successful transfer of its knowledge. For some, the knowledge-receiving country is responsible for adapting the content provided to it to enable policy implementation. “I just think that, for other countries to use it, they will have to adapt to their realities, but all the knowledge about Brazil was translated and are in that [WWP digital platform]”, answered a respondent. For others, it would be necessary to have more knowledge exchange between Brazil and the other countries of the South through the WWP digital platform. It should, therefore, have become a more interactive environment²³, creating an epistemic community. Some even believe that if the WWP had evolved to document not only Brazilian experiences, but also those of other countries in the South, the initiative could have stayed active longer.

The material developed by the WWP, in addition to its usefulness for the Brazilian government itself and for national researchers, could have been better used and consumed by the foreign public if the initiative had external governance strategies that allowed greater interactivity among its target audience. (GARCIA, 2018, p. 91).

²³ Interactivity would be based on the collaboration of different stakeholders (users and producers) and how they interact with each other. It would be a model where WWP practitioners could also collaborate with WWP stakeholders in the knowledge generation for effective transfer (KOTHARI; BIRCH; CHARLES, 2005; WEISS, 1991 *apud* GRAHAM, 2008).

Porto de Oliveira and Pal (2018, p. 215) stated that is very common Brazilian experts offer technical assistance to different governments, but not concerned with mutual learning. “Although we understand transfers as a unilateral process, we must pay more attention to how the learning process can take place in both directions”. In fact, according to the WWP final report, it was expected that the initiative would encourage the exchange of experiences between countries in the Global South.

The initiative seeks to stimulate the exchange of implementation practices by offering opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and a well-organised virtual space for leading social policymakers and practitioners to debate social problems and the ways to end poverty. (WWP, 2017, p. 13).

According to Garcia (2018), the WWP would become a plural and multidirectional network for the knowledge dissemination on social policies. However, the digital platform did not manage to move in this direction, having mostly adopted the unidirectional flow of information and low interactivity. According to Garcia (2018), there were occasional attempts to adopt bidirectional and multidirectional flows in the sharing of knowledge of social policies, through face-to-face events, webinars and short videos²⁴ that presented, succinctly, some policy adopted by other countries that had been inspired by the Brazilian experience. It is possible to state that WWP did not have enough time to achieve its objective of influencing the development of policy transfer initiatives inspired by the Brazilian experience within the scope of South-South Cooperation. The initiative ended in December 2017. One reason given by the respondents was the failure in obtaining a new financing fund, but the most decisive was the economic recession and the political instability that hit Brazil since 2014, which threatened the international image of Brazil as a protagonist in reducing poverty.

When WWP was created, Brazil was “the next big thing”, and so the WWP speech was directed. However, [focusing only on the Brazilian experience] offered a great risk. After 2014, Brazil started to go into recession, the political situation was unstable, there was an impeachment and a very slow recovery in the post-recession years. The scenario changed a lot and all that discourse built on Brazil's leading role in the diffusion of social policies fell apart. In my view, this also contributed to

²⁴ In December 2105, the first material on another country's experience in social policy was made available on the WWP website. The video featured the *Lisungi* Programme, from Congo, inspired by the *Bolsa Familia* Programme: <https://wwp.org.br/en/video/lisungi-program-republic-of-the-congo/>.

the closure of the initiative in 2017. (excerpt from interview with a WWP staff).

At the beginning of the WWP, there was a lot of political support for the initiative to thrive. “When WWP started, it was at a high level. We met with the president of IPEA, the minister of MDS, the director of the World Bank, and they were giving the guidelines. We had a lot of political support, however, when you change the polity, it all falls apart”, said one participant. After 2016, with a new conservative government assuming the presidency of Brazil and with several management changes, mainly in the MDS, the maintenance of the initiative was no longer a consensus, leading to its closure.

Analysis and final considerations

Based on the literature review, this study found that there is a research gap on knowledge translation within the scope of public policy transfer, especially in the context of South-South Cooperation (SSC). In addition, there is also a gap in empirical analysis on knowledge translation undertaken by digital platforms for SSC, such as the Brazil Learning Initiative for a World Without Poverty (WWP). WWP was a digital platform, active from 2013 to 2017, whose main goal was to disseminate Brazilian poverty reduction policies. It was funded by the World Bank and managed by the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG), the Institute for Applied Economic Research of Brazil (IPEA) and the Ministry of Social Development of Brazil (MDS).

This is a challenging and full of potential subject that should be more explored by public policy and international relations researchers. One of these challenges is understanding the way these digital platforms for SSC capture and document public policy experiences and the possibilities for them to inspire other countries to adapt knowledge to their realities in order to meet a real need. Therefore, this study sought to answer the following main question: “how did the WWP translate the knowledge of Brazilian social policies?”.

By focusing on the hypothesis that WWP failed in its main goal of reaching the target audience and transferring policies from Brazil to Latin American and African countries, this study interviewed five WWP staff members to understand the WWP knowledge translation process. It found that WWP content was produced by a team of high-skilled experts on Brazilian social policies, with the prominence of the World Bank and the MDS staff. The knowledge generation process was settled by an inter-organisational governance structure composed of an Editorial Committee, a Technical Committee and a Communication Committee – each of them with representatives of the four partners of the initiative, who were in charge of producing, validating and approving the WWP materials. Therefore, ensuring the quality standard of WWP publications. The content was generated according to one of the seven thematic axes, following different levels of knowledge, and based on a script composed of a set of topics that should be covered. The main concern of WWP knowledge translation was to facilitate the comprehension of the so-called “how to” approach, which explains how the programme works or how to do something similar.

Based on literature review and interviews with five WWP staff members, this study founded that despite all the effort made by WWP to translate knowledge of Brazilian social policies in a robust set of materials and publications, a lack of self-criticism and of documenting lessons learned threatened the translation of Brazilian social policies promoted by the initiative. These two factors were influenced by the fear of the political impact of admitting failures or exposing vulnerabilities in the implementation of Brazilian social policies.

We hope this work has enriched the reflection, from a perspective based on empirical and theoretical contribution from the South, about the challenge of translating public policies for actors as heterogeneous as those involved in SSC and in an environment as plural, democratic, and innovative as the Internet.

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